

**INFORMATION RESOURCES
TO ENHANCE DIVERSE PARTICIPATION
IN INTERNET GOVERNANCE AND ICT POLICY DISCUSSION:
A PROPOSAL**

The following proposal follows discussion amongst capacity-building specialists at a conference on *Internet Governance: the Way Forward* organised by the DiploFoundation in Malta, 10-12 February 2006. It reflects concern within the conference at the need to build capacity in Internet governance issues, across the whole range of stakeholders directly engaged in IG and ICT policy issues and within the wider community affected by them.

In particular, it reflects concern that capacity-building should be seen, not just as a matter of training, but as requiring the availability of high-quality accessible information for both existing and would-be participants. This has the potential both to extend participation to a broader community and to improve the quality of dialogue, discussion and development of Internet governance and wider ICT policy.

This proposal was drawn up at the invitation of capacity-building specialists at the DiploFoundation conference, and is put forward to seek potential support and partnership for involvement. The authors are willing to develop the ideas set out below in further detail following the initial IGF consultation meeting in Geneva, February 2006, in conjunction with willing partners, in support of the diversity and informed dialogue that lie at the heart of the IGF's objectives.

Comments and feedback are welcome and should be directed to David Souter, Coordinating Focal point, or in person during the IGF consultations to Adam Peake and Karen Banks.

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The *Louder Voices* report assessed smaller and developing country participation in international ICT institutions for the DOT Force in 2002. In interviews conducted for that report, developing country participants in international ICT decision-making meetings repeatedly commented on the lack of *useful* information resources which would enable them to play an effective part in negotiating and decision-making processes. What did they have in mind?:

Firstly, they said that they lacked basic information about the institutions in which they were representing their countries and the negotiating or decision-making processes in which they were taking part. In fact, most international organisations provide some basic "what we are" information; but few offer substantive guidance on procedural matters – or, if they do, this usually describes the formal decision-making process rather than the informal context which is at least equally important in determining outcomes.

Secondly, they said that they lacked straightforward, objective information about issues under discussion. Certainly, a great deal of information was available – file upon file upon file, or pile upon pile upon pile, depending on how they chose to access it: thousands upon thousands of words, that is, representing different stages in complex negotiating processes, meaningful to full-time participants in a negotiating process but frankly worthless to those who were not already "in the know". Where short, straightforward accounts of issues were available, these were rarely the objective accounts that participants in decision-making processes needed but partisan accounts designed to solicit their support for one or other major player. Portals did not provide an adequate substitute as they tended to offer access to the whole array of available information rather than a trusted resource for objective information and analysis.

Thirdly, they lacked update information providing an account of where issues had progressed through a decision-making process, alerting them to the key issues of the moment: the questions that would be central to debate at the next negotiating or decision-making meeting. (This, they said, was often exacerbated by weak knowledge management processes within government.)

These problems – essentially a combination of information overload and information deficit – affect not only delegates representing governments at international meetings but also other stakeholders taking part (or wishing to take part) in national policy discourse. They were already evident in Internet governance issues in 2002, at the time of the *Louder Voices* research, and similar comments have been made by many participants, across the range of stakeholders and countries, since then. It is easy to see that they will continue in the post-WSIS period, and that they potentially limit the inclusiveness, diversity and quality of discourse in the Internet Governance Forum and other contexts.

The central desire expressed by *Louder Voices* interviewees, and reiterated by other since, is for clear, objective information which will help them to understand issues, assess their interaction with national contexts, identify priorities for national and/or stakeholder policymaking and engage effectively at both national and international levels. This proposal suggests three ways in which this information deficit might be addressed. While these would require some resources, we believe that a relatively small outlay in commitment and other resources would lead to substantial gains in both inclusiveness and informed debate that would benefit the whole Internet governance and ICT policy community.

The three components of the proposal are as follows:

1. Short, objective descriptive guidance notes should be prepared on each international institution involved in IG / ICT decision-making. These notes should follow a consistent pattern, including clear and objective accounts of a) the institution's role/mandate; b) its membership and governance arrangements; c) its policymaking processes, including discussion spaces such as working groups; d) the key issues currently under discussion with these processes; and e) references to other sources [and ICT processes] providing supplementary information. They should be prepared by independent authors, liaising as appropriate with each institution concerned, in order to establish the most effective combination of objectivity and authority. They should be updated regularly; checked for accuracy and modified to reflect new developments at least every six months.
2. Clear, objective accounts should be prepared and made available shortly (preferably within a week) after the occurrence of all significant international IG / ICT meetings and the publication of all significant international IG / ICT reports. These would be less formal in style and more analytical than formal meeting records, and would provide sufficient information about the content and outcome of meetings/reports to enable users to understand, assess, identify and engage as described in paragraph 8 above. They would be written objectively and independently of the institutions concerned, but in liaison with them, and would include summaries or full texts of agreements and/or relevant URL references as appropriate. They would also identify key participants and summarise their positions in debate. Such accounts would be particularly valuable to delegates about to attend successor meetings. Together, over a period of time, they would provide an archived resource which would, among other things, facilitate knowledge management within governments and other organisations. A relevant model for the content required might be the UN Non-Government Liaison Service's journal *The Go-Between*, but in this case material would be published online as soon as available rather than at periodic intervals.
3. In addition to these two types of objective "published" material, it might be useful to create a space in which accredited participants or observers of particular IG / ICT institutions, particularly those whose work is more obscure, agreed to provide short summaries of current events or issues within them. These could help to flesh out the substance of the material described in the previous two paragraphs, but care would need to be taken – through a process of accreditation – to ensure that they reflected a common understanding of these events/issues rather than a partisan interpretation of them.

As noted above, these proposals are written as an invitation to potential partners, and the authors would welcome expressions of interest and willingness to engage further. The authors are willing to develop these ideas further on behalf of the IG and wider ICT communities should sufficient interest be expressed.